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Third report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the situation in the Central African Republic and on the activities of the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA)

I. Introduction

1. The statement by the President of the Security Council dated 23 January 2001 (S/PRST/2001/2) requested me to keep the Council regularly informed of the activities of the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA) and of the situation in the Central African Republic, including the progress achieved in implementing political, economic and social reforms.

2. The Security Council also requested me to submit to it a report on the situation by 30 June 2001, at the latest, pursuant to the statement by its President dated 10 February 2000. The present report is in response to that request. It is the third report to have been prepared since the establishment of BONUCA, on 16 February 2000, and covers the period from February to June 2001.

II. The political situation

3. The political situation in the Central African Republic was recently exacerbated by a wholly unexpected attempted coup d'état. During the night of 27 to 28 May 2001, a group of soldiers attempted to overthrow the regime of President Patassé and to seize power. The putschists simultaneously attacked the residence of the head of State, the national radio and the headquarters of the Presidential Guard. They were repulsed by loyalist forces and the coup attempt failed thanks to the support of Libyan troops sent to Bangui and to the support of elements of the Congolese rebel movement of Mr. Jean-Pierre Bemba. I immediately on 28 May expressed my vigorous condemnation of this attempted coup against an elected Government, as did the Security Council in the statement by its President dated 31 May 2001.

4. On 30 May 2001, General André Kolingba, a former President of the Republic, claimed responsibility for the attempted coup. In a statement, he demanded that President Patassé "resign and hand over power to him" and pledged to "guarantee his personal security and the safety of his property". On 31 May, President Patassé issued a decree demoting General Kolingba and four other officers involved in the coup to the rank of privates and decided to institute charges against them and all the others involved in the attempted coup.

5. On 1 June 2001, former President Kolingba called on the putschists to cease fighting and to lay down their weapons. He also requested a meeting with the Minister of Defence "on neutral ground". President Patassé rejected this offer of negotiations. The clashes therefore continued between loyalists and putschists and ended on 6 June 2001.

6. On 8 June 2001, President Patassé solemnly announced the failure of the *coup d'état* and called on workers to return to work. He thanked those States and organizations that had condemned the attempted coup and mentioned in particular the prompt reaction of the United Nations and especially of the Security Council. He reaffirmed that the trial of the putschists would be held under transparent conditions and that international observers would be allowed to monitor it. President

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Patassé lastly requested international attestation of the fact that weapons had been found in the residence of former President Kolingba and asked that a Security Council delegation be sent to Bangui for that purpose.

7. The situation is gradually returning to normal in Bangui. The Government is working to restore security in the capital. The casualty figures from the clashes are very high: according to the authorities, 59 persons were killed (25 military and 34 civilians) and 88,765 displaced. Destruction of property (public buildings, private homes) and looting also took place. Agencies of the United Nations system, donors and international non-governmental organizations are mobilizing to provide appropriate humanitarian assistance, which the authorities estimate will cost US$ 3.6 million.

8. In view of the new crisis that arose following the attempted coup d'état of 28 May, I dispatched General Amadou Toumani Touré, former President of Mali, as my Special Envoy to the Central African Republic from 12 June to 1 July. My Special Envoy is very familiar with the situation on the ground, since he was a key member of the International Monitoring Committee and of the Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Agreements (MISAB), following the mutinies of 1996 and 1997. His mandate was to, inter alia, hold discussions on the current political situation with the authorities, leaders of political parties and civil society stakeholders; assess the humanitarian consequences of the fighting and consider how best the needs that were identified might be met; and encourage a resumption of the political dialogue in the country. In the report that he submitted to me, my Special Envoy made a number of recommendations to assist the Central African Republic in overcoming this situation of crisis. Several of these recommendations are contained in the present report.

9. It should be pointed out that the use of force came as a genuine surprise for the people of the Central African Republic. While it is true that social tensions remained high following another breakdown in the dialogue between the Government and the trade unions and that the dialogue between the majority party and the opposition remained at an impasse, that in no way justified a challenge to the constitutional order. Indeed, the cabinet reshuffle that had been expected for months had finally taken place. A new Prime Minister, Mr. Martin Ziguélé, a member of the Movement for the Liberation of the Central African People (MLPC), the party in power, had been appointed on 1 April of this year. The head of government had presented his programme to the Parliament on 7 May and, in the absence of the opposition, had received a vote of confidence, even though the opposition contests the validity of that vote under the Constitution of the Central African Republic.

10. This programme had been welcomed, even by the Government's political opponents, during the debates in Parliament, especially because of its provisions relating to the fight against corruption and misappropriation of funds. The idea of an attempted coup d'état, especially one instigated by the leader of the main opposition party in Parliament, was therefore completely unexpected. This was also the reason why all political figures (including opposition parties) and civil society stakeholders roundly condemned it.

III. The social situation

11. Despite the return to normalcy in the capital since the end of the fighting, the resumption of work has not been complete in a public sector affected by a strike of civil servants before the attempted *coup d'état*. The social movement had begun with a warning strike from 14 to 18 May 2001. The strike had been renewed from 21 to 25 May. Workers demanded payment of salaries for April and May before any resumption of work. After the strike by civil servants from October 2000 to January 2001, the Government had agreed to pay three months of arrears in wages in January 2001. Following mediation by the Archbishop of Bangui and by my representative, which had been requested by the trade unions, the two parties signed on 6 March 2001 a communiqué in which the Government pledged to pay the salaries of civil servants every month. In exchange, the workers agreed to return to work and to observe a social truce for a period of two months, renewable once.

12. When the social truce ended on 5 May 2001, the trade unions refused to renew it on the grounds that the Government had failed to honour its commitments, since salaries for the month of March had not been paid until April. For its part, the Government considered that recourse to the strike was "premature and unjustified", since "two salaries out of three (February and March) had been fully paid" since the beginning of the social truce on 6 March 2001.

13. It should be noted that the authorities had announced the payment after 26 May of salaries for the month of April. This payment was interrupted by the attempted *coup d'état*. The civil servants' strike therefore continues, since it has not been officially called off. This situation of social tension risks continuing because of the adverse consequences of the failed coup attempt on the capacity of the Central African Republic in the current situation to mobilize the resources necessary to meet its basic expenses.

IV. The human rights situation

14. The situation of human rights has been markedly affected by the events that followed the attempted *coup d'état*. Civilian populations were particularly affected, in that thousands of persons were displaced from one district to the other of Bangui, in the suburbs of the capital. Cases of exactions and of the summary executions of civilian and military personnel were reported. The Government pledged to put an end to those acts. To do so, it has introduced special military patrols to restore security in the capital. The human rights section of BONUCA is currently evaluating the situation, in cooperation with relevant non-governmental organizations and the competent authorities.

15. In general terms, since my last report, the prison situation continues to give cause for concern. Visits to detention centres in the country's interior, police stations and gendarmerie brigades in Bangui show that detention centres need to be urgently rehabilitated. Moreover, cases of serious or contagious illnesses have been reported in the different centres, together with cases of the ill and/or degrading treatment of detainees.

16. The number of persons imprisoned without trial for many years and arbitrary and illegal detentions have contributed to an increase in the prison population in certain provinces. My Representative has repeatedly drawn the attention of the Central African authorities to the measures that must be taken to improve the situation of detainees in prisons, in accordance with the international juridical instruments ratified by the Central African Republic. The Government, moreover, has just listed as one of its priority programmes the rehabilitation of the Ngaragba central prison in Bangui, which had been destroyed in the mutinies of 1996.

17. During the period under review, there have been a number of attempts to restrict freedom of movement, which is protected by article 4 of the Constitution of the Central African Republic. Political and trade union leaders have been prohibited from leaving the country. Prompt intervention by my Representative with the authorities brought an end to this situation.

18. As part of its activities to strengthen the capacities of national institutions for the promotion of human rights, BONUCA organized in Bangui from 6 to 8 February 2001, in partnership with the Central African Republic Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, an instructors training workshop for senior officials of ministerial departments. It also organized in Bambari from 3 to 19 May 2001, in partnership with the Ministries of Defence and the Interior, an initial training session for officials in the implementation of laws in the provinces. The programme of judicial assistance for victims of human rights violations in courts and tribunals was launched on 1 March 2001, in partnership with the bar of the Central African Republic. The Office is continuing its programmes for the dissemination and popularization of human rights through the media. It has also embarked on the translation into the national language, Sango, of the principal international legal texts and instruments ratified by the Central African Republic in the area of the promotion and protection of human rights.

V. The security and military situation

19. The attempted *coup d'état* of 28 May 2001 had serious repercussions on the military and security situation. The vast majority of the army remained loyal and, according to the authorities, the number of participants in the attempted coup never exceeded 100 or so. It therefore seems unlikely that the failed coup attempt has jeopardized the restructuring of the defence and security forces upon which the Government had embarked, especially since the Higher Council on Conditions in the Military, which was entrusted with the task of reviewing the living and working conditions of soldiers, was established on 23 May last.

20. More generally speaking, the period from February to June 2001 was marked by heightened insecurity in certain provinces. "Roadblockers" or "Zaraguinas" committed a number of criminal and often deadly acts: attacks on travellers, military

convoys and cattle farmers, and pillaging of refugee camps and villages. In Bangui itself, a number of acts of armed banditry (hold-ups, thefts) were reported, thus highlighting the situation of proliferation of illegally owned weapons.

21. Generally speaking, since the attempted *coup d'état*, security has been restored in Bangui. However, the population remains concerned because of exactions and settling of scores, which are apparently targeted, but also because of rumours of imminent attack by the putschists. The Government has firmly rejected any idea of persecution of an ethnic group. It has taken measures to restore security throughout the capital. The fear exists, however, that infiltration within the civilian population of elements that participated in the putsch might in the longer term prove to be the source of a new wave of insecurity, just as a possible attack by the main coup plotters who have since fled might be.

22. In terms of activities, the military and civilian police teams of BONUCA undertook a fact-finding mission on the border between the Central African Republic and Cameroon last March, following the tensions that had arisen between the two countries in February 2001. This initiative by my Representative resulted in an easing of tensions that permitted the two countries to envisage the demarcation of their common border within the framework of their mixed commission on cooperation. As part of its activities to provide support for the police and gendarmerie of the Central African Republic, the civilian police team organized during the period from March to May 2001 a number of training programmes: a specialized course in transmissions, a specialized course in economic and financial policing, refresher training for police officers, and a professional training course for the gendarmerie.

VI. The economic situation

23. The attempted *coup d'état* further damaged the Central African economy. The interruption of economic activity for two weeks will without a doubt have catastrophic consequences for an already fragile economy. As the Prime Minister said, the failed coup attempt has "wiped out" all the economic recovery efforts which the country has made with the support of its development partners.

24. The most recent joint mission of the Bretton Woods institutions, in which a delegation from the African Development Bank also participated, visited Bangui from 13 to 27 May 2001. The mission concluded that the Government should pursue and intensify its efforts in the area of economic and financial reforms. Observance of performance criteria was to have been evaluated at the end of June, with an additional review being conducted during the last quarter of the year. The case of the Central African Republic was to have been submitted to the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund in September and a decision on its eligibility for the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative (HIPC) was to have been taken in December 2001.

25. Recent events will have a negative impact on these timelines. Agreement must therefore be reached with the Government of the Central African Republic that the emergency situation that currently exists in the country requires emergency assistance from donors and the international community to meet priority needs, before considering any solution to overcome the crisis. To this end, the authorities have just elaborated and presented to the diplomatic corps and agencies of the United Nations system in Bangui a "minimum plan of action for social and economic recovery", estimated to cost approximately US$ 75 million. In order to really assist the Central African Republic, donors and the international community in general should respond promptly and positively to this request for assistance, which is crucial to the country's future.

VII. Relations between the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo

26. The consequences for the Central African Republic of the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had thus far been felt in the economic (interruption of river traffic on the Ubangui, supply difficulties), humanitarian (refugee flows) and security (risk of illegal circulation of weapons) fields. With the attempted *coup d'état* and the support provided by the Front de libération des Congolais of Mr. Jean-Pierre Bemba to President Patassé, the impact of the conflict risked also having a political dimension in terms of bilateral relations. While reiterating his desire to see peace restored in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Patassé had expressed special gratitude to

Mr. Bemba for helping him rout the putschists. This support by the rebel movement for the Government of the Central African Republic had not been appreciated by the Congolese authorities, who had expressed surprise, in view of the defence agreement between the two States.

27. The recent visit of a Congolese delegation to Bangui helped clear up the misunderstandings between the two Governments. The Congo River Basin Authority now being planned will certainly provide a suitable framework for building confidence and cooperation between the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

VIII. Observations

28. The attempted *coup d'état* revealed the precariousness of the overall situation and further weakened the Central African Republic. It jeopardized the efforts which the international community has been making for five years with a view to the restoration and then the consolidation of peace. It endangered the democratic process and impeded the country's efforts for economic recovery. The Central African Republic is therefore in a crisis situation which is not fundamentally different from the situation caused by the 1996-1997 mutinies. It is experiencing an economic emergency which requires prompt assistance from the international community. Bilateral and multilateral partners should show exceptional solicitude in this case. I encourage them to review the minimum plan of action referred to in paragraph 25 and to see to what extent they could assist in its implementation.

29. I encourage the international community and the development partners of the Central African Republic, out of concern for peace and stability in this country, to provide urgent support to the restructuring of the defence and security forces, the collection of weapons and the redeployment plan drawn up by the Government. The continuation and completion of the restructuring of the armed forces is a priority task. The efforts already made in this sphere and the training provided by BONUCA enabled the army of the Central African Republic to demonstrate its loyalty during the attempted *coup d'état*.

30. There is no question that it is poverty which, in the final analysis, is the breeding ground for the instability experienced by the Central African Republic, but it is partly because of the financial difficulties of the State and the subsequent salary crisis that the political and economic situation has become so fragile. Efforts should be made to provide substantial assistance in this sphere so as to prevent this situation from deteriorating and the Central African Republic from continuing to be the "soft underbelly" of the subregion.

31. While the international community has a duty of solidarity towards the Central African Republic, the Central Africans, in return, have an urgent duty to work together to establish the conditions for a political system based on consensus. To this end, they should urgently re-establish political dialogue, restore confidence among themselves, foster consultations and promote tolerance. I welcome the recent initiatives taken by the Parliament, which adopted a resolution on 21 June unanimously condemning the attempted coup, and by President Patassé, who met with the leaders of the political parties on 25 June. I also urge the Government to continue to ensure respect for the human rights of all Central Africans. BONUCA will continue its efforts to facilitate the attainment of these objectives.

32. I therefore encourage the Central African political actors to continue and strengthen these initiatives with a view to consolidating peace, democratic institutions and national unity in the Central African Republic. The majority must allow the opposition to carry out its activities freely and the opposition, while performing in a constructive and responsible manner its role of critic and monitor of the actions of the Government pending the next elections, must let the majority govern. It is on these conditions alone that the Central African Republic will be able to emerge from this interminable crisis situation which seems to be its defining characteristic. At the subregional level, I encourage the Central African Republic to intensify its relations with its neighbours in order to reduce the tension which may compromise the precarious stability of the subregion.

33. At the time of submitting this report, I should like to pay a warm tribute to my former representative, Mr. Cheikh Tidiane Sy, for the remarkable work he carried out with integrity and dedication at the head of BONUCA.